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ABSTRACT

The challenge of effective writing instruction was investigated by means of a literature review. Writing, as a part of the field of Language Arts, comprising reading, writing, listening and speaking, takes more than teaching spelling, grammar, and other writing conventions for students to develop as writers. The writing process--prewriting, writing, sharing/responding, revising, editing, and publishing--is a successful strategy utilized to teach children to write. Mini-lessons are used to teach students the steps in the writing process along with strategies to improve as writers. The research on the success of using the writing process was found through published books, articles, workshops, and the author's personal experiences. (Contains 40 references.) (Author/RS)

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Strategies for Teaching Writing to Primary Students Using the Writing Process

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Education

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Abstract

The challenge of effective writing instruction was investigated by means of a literature review. Writing, as a part of the field of Language Arts, comprising reading, writing, listening and speaking, takes more than teaching spelling, grammar and other writing conventions for students to develop as writers. The writing process- - prewriting, writing, sharing/responding, revising, editing, and publishing - - is a successful strategy utilized to teach children to write. Mini-lessons are used to teach students the steps in the writing process along with strategies to improve as writers. The research on the success of using the writing process was found through published books, articles, workshops, and the author's personal experiences.

Strategies for Teaching Writing to Primary Students Using the Writing Process

M.A. Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Education

Biola University

La Mirada, California

USA

By

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Fall 2001

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Department Chair: June Hetzel Date: 12/10/01

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Introduction

The Difficulties of Teaching Writing

There are several steps a writer must follow that result in a polished finished product. It is difficult for beginning students to imagine that their writing can develop or improve to this level. In this author's experience, students dislike writing because they feel inadequate. They believe it is impossible for them to improve. Teachers often feed this perception by not offering concrete instruction on how to improve their writing. Teachers are given teacher's manuals that demonstrate how to teach math and reading. It is rare for a teacher to be given a book demonstrating how to teach writing. They may have a book filled with grammar skills, but this does not teach how to write. Many teachers do not write themselves, or feel that their own writing is inadequate. Teachers are faced with the responsibility of teaching children to write without being proficient themselves. They rely on teaching grammar skills, but this often leads to students hating writing, rather than loving it. Writing becomes a boring and rule-based task (Hicks, 1993).

Writing is the process of transforming thoughts into written communication. Good writing can be very difficult to achieve, especially if it is taught in a hit-or-miss fashion. Often, teachers give examples of good writing, and tell their students when they produce good writing, but do not actually teach the steps that lead to good writing. Writing can be broken into stages, which once taught, simplify the process. This method has been labeled "The Writing Process" (Graves, 1994; Norton, 1993). When the writing process is used to teach writing, students begin to understand that

they have "ideas to express, that they can find words to communicate those ideas, that others are interested in what they have to say, and finally that they have or can acquire the expertise to clarify that communication" (Cullinan, 1993, p. 4). This process, which includes prewriting, writing, sharing/responding, revising, editing, publishing and evaluating, can be adapted to any age, but the author's main focus will be on primary grade students.

The Value of Writing

Children come to school imparted with their parent's view of the necessity of writing. Some arrive seeing the many uses of writing, while others have little experiences with written text. Teachers need to teach children to write because it contributes to their development as people. "The value that we place on reading and writing arises out of our shared need to be literate people; this need is a function of our society and of our culture" (Heller, 1991, p.13).

Most children have little difficulty telling a story orally. They tell stories about real life events and make up magnificent fairy tales. Children are full of stories until they are required to write them down. Suddenly they become blank, saying, "I do not know what to write," yet there are stories begging to be told.

Students often view writing as another form of talking. They do not understand the need to write down what they could more easily relay verbally. The child assumes that they will be present when another person is reading their piece, so that if the reader has a question they address it directly. In a child's mind, information is transferred only while both parties are present. Children have difficulty

understanding that an unfamiliar person is reading their story, and that the reader has not opportunity to clarify various parts of the piece (Graves, 1983).

Before children will start writing they must realize that there is a purpose for writing. Writing invites other people to read children's thoughts and words at their convenience, and enables children to mentally work through problems on paper. Writing opens children's mind to creating a visual image of their topic, and helps them to articulate their thoughts in a creative way (Calkins, 1990).

There are many methods teachers can use to help students see the value of writing. Student folders holding all the students' work provide one way to help children visually appreciate the extent and quantity they are producing. Later, the students can review their work and see how they have progressed in their writing style (Graves, 1983). One of elementary students' favorite writing topics is personal experience. When children reread stories they wrote at the beginning of the year, they are reminded of what happened earlier. This memory excites the children to write more because a purpose for writing has been discovered. Students' work can be published and then made available for checkout in the class library. In this way, their words are revisited throughout the year, thus giving students a pride that their work is lasting. Some students will even leave their books for the next class to enjoy. Keeping books and charts the class has made, shows how writing endures and places importance on student's writing.

Another way to demonstrate the power of writing to elementary students is to read a student's work while that student is absent. This helps other students realize

that writing remains even when the student is not present and is something permanent. When the student returns, they will be amazed that the class read their words while they were away, and feel empowered that part of them was still there, participating while they were physically absent. If the students' writing is used as examples of how text endures, children will begin to value writing and see a purpose in creating it (Graves, 1983).

The Field of Language Arts

The field of language arts includes reading, writing, listening and speaking (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). These language modes are all connected in the way they compare and contrast with each other and are better learned alongside one another. Speaking and listening are usually learned informally at home before the child ever attends school. Reading and writing are taught more formally in the school setting, often using speaking and listening skills as their foundation. The four modes of language arts build on one another and all should be cultivated.

Listening and speaking are both verbal, while reading and writing are written. On the other hand, writing and speaking are both expressive skills, while reading and listening are receptive skills. Thoughts must be formulated before one can speak or write. Listening and reading involve receiving another person's idea. In speaking and writing, each person finds their own creative voice. They creatively choose words to express ideas, and choose how to put these words together to formulate a cohesive thought (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

At a writing workshop for children Joel Salzman, (2001) said, "Writing is talking on paper." This is not necessarily the case. They both use words, information, order, and organization, but speech also uses facial expression, voice tone, and gestures. When one speaks one can respond to the listeners. Speaking to a crowd, one can read the crowd's facial expressions for signs of boredom or interest, agreement or disagreement, understanding or confusion. Then the speaker can adjust his speech to attain the desired reaction. Moreover, in a conversation, the speaker is able to respond to the body language and comments of the other person. The conversation is no longer one-sided. Each person responds to what the last person has said. As the conversation flows, it may skip from topic to topic. Unlike written speech, in conversation, response is immediate, so misperceptions or miscommunications can be cleared up immediately. In speaking children are used to leaving out details because they use their arms, and voice to show what they mean. It is important for children to understand the differences between speaking and writing so that important information is not left out (Graves, 1983).

Young writers find it difficult to move from speaking into writing. There are social expectations placed on writing that they did not have to deal with in speaking (Tompkins, 1994). Conventions suddenly come into play. They are expected to spell and use punctuation. Their voice can no longer be used to stress words. It is a struggle to explain things without using gestures or tone of voice to mimic a sound. They must find a way for their voice to be heard on paper. This only happens through much practice and, usually, many drafts. Class discussions about the differences of speaking

and writing can help students understand that there are differences and, more importantly, similarities. A Venn diagram can show similarities as well as differences to visually help students understand the differences.

"Now reading specialists and others recognize that reading and writing are closely related and are best developed in tandem" (Stewig & Norberg, 1995, p.209). Each involves creating meaning through print. Writing creates a need to read and listen while, reading creates the need to write and talk. A person starting to write may realize that more information is needed which can be obtained through reading or listening to another person. A writer with writer's block can turn to reading for inspiration. Conversely, reading can inspire a writer to have ideas of what to write about or show them how to improve their writing. Often, reading a story will elicit emotions that need to be shared by writing or talking about them (Graves, 1983).

"Teaching students reading without including writing is like teaching them to swim with one hand tied behind them" (Cullinan, 1993, p. 2). Writing improves reading while reading improves writing. Reading gives examples of good writing. As children read, they discover ways that writers express themselves on paper. They also see grammar, punctuation and spelling being used correctly. "Through books students take root in our literary tradition; books help children begin to internalize myriad conventions of language. Books teach skills and techniques ranging from the most concrete (punctuation, paragraphing) to the most ephemeral (metaphors, rhythm, tension, foreshadowing)" (Cullinan, 1993, p. 8). Reading does influence students to become better writers. As children write they are pressed to attach sound to letters,

which helps them in reading. They also begin to notice patterns in words as they write which helps them read even longer words.

Reading, writing, listening and speaking are all interrelated. One cannot be addressed without incorporating the others. As strategies for the writing process are discussed, it will become clear that they all work together.

Description of the Parts of the Writing Process

The writing process gives students a structure for writing. It includes these six stages: pre-writing, writing, sharing and responding, revising, editing, and publishing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1991; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). A brief description of each will be given, and then later expanded on.

Prewriting is the process that occurs prior to composing or writing. It is designed to stimulate ideas and gather raw material that the writer later will use to compose a piece. The purpose of writing is to communicate a thought or idea. Before starting to write students must understand what they have available to communicate. There are several methods of prewriting such as reading, brainstorming, clustering, debating, free writing, looping, and cubing, which will be discussed in more detail later. "Any exercise which stimulates the writer's inner voice to seek verbalization is a prewriting activity" (Olson, 1996, p. 1). This is usually the first step in the writing process, but it may also be used to gather additional ideas after a child has already started to write.

Writing or composing is the stage where students put their ideas on paper. At this point they may not have decided which direction their piece will go. Yet, as they

put words on paper, they begin to formulate ideas and organize their thoughts. "This movement of an idea to the conscious level allows for spontaneity and creativity and must not be impeded by concerns over correctness" (Perl, 1980, p. 8).

Once the students have written something, they can move on to sharing or reading their piece to another person. Writing can be difficult because it is one-way communication. The writer may become so absorbed in their writing that they forget about their audience entirely. Or, they may think they are saying one thing, but the reader understands something completely different. Sharing gives the writer an opportunity to focus on their audience and receive helpful feedback. The writer may then choose to revise the piece so that their writing reflects what they intended to communicate.

Responding allows the listener to let the writer know what they understood the piece to be saying. Responding to writing helps both the person sharing and the person listening. The writer is encouraged by the responses of the listener and gains insight on what should be changed. The listener can gain ideas to use in their own writing. "In responding to the writing being shared by others, writers and listeners gain a clearer sense of what distinguishes effective from ineffective writing" (Olson, 1996, p.2).

Revision is not editing. "It is the re-seeing of a piece in light of feedback" (Olson, 1996, p. 2). After sharing, the writer has gained an idea of how to rework their text. They may need to add, delete, rearrange, and substitute words, to make

their words accurately express their ideas. Words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs may need to be changed.

Revision is not a one-time event. As Sondra Perl explains, "Writing is not simply a linear process but a 'forward moving action that exists by virtue of a backward moving action.' Writers put words on a page and immediately go back and see what they have created" (Olson, 1996, p. 2). Students need to learn to look backwards at what they have written so that they can move forward to elaborate on it. Revision may take place after sharing a piece, but most likely it has already been taking place as they were writing.

Editing is the stage when the writer focuses on correctness. Now the writer is not reworking the text, because that was done in the revision stage. Instead, editing is checking for correct punctuation, spelling, grammar, and following the standards for written English. The teacher plays an important role in helping the students through this stage. If the teacher edits the child's paper, the child will not improve in editing the next time. Additionally, if grammar is taught separately from writing, the child will have trouble applying the 'rules'. The best method for teaching grammatical rules is for the teacher to give instruction in an ongoing basis, as it is relevant. This can be done by using the student's own writing. The teacher can choose skills that apply to the students' needs and address them. The students' knowledge will grow as they continue to write (Elbow, 1981).

Publishing a work can simply be writing a final draft for the teacher to evaluate, or it can extend in sharing the work with an audience. Publishing is now the

stage when students share their work with an audience. They might want to write it on special paper, type it, make it into a book, or submit it to be published in a newspaper or magazine. Publishing is important because it gives meaning to the student's work. It allows an audience other than just the teacher to appreciate the work (Calkins, 1983).

Evaluating is the final stage in the writing process, the stage when students get feedback on their project, often in the form of a grade. This stage is very important in making the writing process a success or a failure. Problems arise when the students are evaluated using different criteria than they expected. If the students know the criteria by which they are being graded ahead of time, then they can focus their revision and editing to meet the criteria. Otherwise the students will become frustrated and lose their desire to continue writing, feeling like they cannot be successful at writing. The best way to evaluate students is to dialogue with them, using the evaluation as a combined effort of the teacher and student (Smith, 1982). The evaluation should be used to help the child to see how they can improve other pieces, not to tear apart what they have just written.

Methods to Teach Each Stage of the Writing Process

Prewriting

There are many methods to teach prewriting. The key to teaching any of these methods is to model them first. The teacher may wish to model a different method each week, and then encourage the students to choose which ones work best for them. They may even develop their own form of prewriting. Prewriting strategies can help

students select what they are most interested in writing about which helps them take ownership of their writing.

Students should have a folder in which to record story ideas. Keeping a folder with all their writing ideas can be helpful, as they may identify five or six different ideas during the prewriting process. As they narrow their ideas down to one, they can be encouraged to save the other topics for another day. A list of writing ideas may be developed, as they hear other students share their stories or when another topic comes to mind as they are writing. This list should grow all year. Teachers should model this by keeping their own list of topics and using the list to discover what to write about (Graves, 1983).

Clustering is a good starting point for teaching prewriting. It starts with a basic idea and related topics or details are added to it. It is a two-dimensional pattern using circled words with lines connecting associated ideas, also known as a web. A linear form of clustering, brainstorming, involves creating a long list of whatever comes to mind. Later the writer can refer to their list and choose something to write about (Goodman, 1999).

Free writing is another way to free the flow of writing. Students simply write, without erasing, or editing, and just keep the pencil moving. This helps children to get their thoughts out without worrying about form, spelling or grammatical rules. Later they can go back and revise or 'loop'. Looping is the skill used when a writer goes back to their free write and circles the one word or phrase that stands out. That circled

topic can become the basis for their writing or it can be used for a second, more focused free-write (Goodman, 1999).

Another popular form of prewriting is to answer the questions: "Who?" "What?" "Where?" "When?" "Why?" and "How?" This can be helpful for children who have a tendency to leave gaps in their stories and it also helps them to write complete fiction stories.

Cubing teaches students to look at different perspectives from which they can write their papers. This works best when it is teacher-led and the topics are similar. For primary students, a teacher might ask the students to choose a favorite animal, then lead them through the different perspectives by asking them a series of questions (Goodman, 1999).

For example:

1) Describe: What does it look like? What is its personality like?

2) Compare or Contrast: Think of something that you can either compare to or contrast with your animal and describe either the similarities or differences.

3) Associate: What other thing does your animal remind you of or make you think of?

4) Analyze: Think about each individual body part of the animal and what they are used for. What makes your animal special from other animals? What makes up this animal you are writing about (personality and body parts)?

5) Apply: What can your animal be used for? How would you use it (as a pet, in a circus?)?

6) Argue for or against: Argue why your animal is best or argue why your animal is not the best. Be sure to include details to support your argument (Goodman, 1999).

Reading can be a wonderful stimulant for writing. It can spark children's imaginations on new topics and inspire them to write. Students, however, should not mimic the author. "Rather, the objective is to enjoy the plots, the fantasies, the taste of words, to be stimulated by the drama of events" (Graves, 1983, p. 29). Students may want to try out some of the author's writing or illustrating styles as they try to discover their own style.

Teachers should select the best literature they can find. Children watch professional sports on TV and feel an urge to engage in sports themselves. They watch a movie about an adventure and they also want to experience an adventure. Good literature inspires students to want to write their own. Reading from different genres will encourage them to try writing different genres (Hansen, 1987).

What if students are still having trouble choosing topics? A student's first experience with free choice will often be difficult. "Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences, even opening paragraphs as a steady diet for three or four years, rightfully panic when topics have to come to them" (Graves, 1983 p.21). Children need to learn to choose topics with which they have experience. At first they might choose topics that are too broad, but through experiences in writing they will learn how to choose topics at which they will be successful. "The data shows that writers who learn to choose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills at the point of best topic" (Graves, 1983, p. 21). This is

because students who have the best control, gain ownership of their piece, and with ownership, they gain pride.

Free choice does not mean that the teacher does not give guidelines or assistance to the students. There are ways that teachers can help their students make wise topic choices. First, teachers must work on getting to know their students, both as a class and as individuals. This seems like something every teacher should want to do, but knowing individual students' interests and experiences can be difficult, unless a student consistently tries to steer all classroom discussion to a favorite topic. Then it is no secret what their first story will be about! It is the quiet students that will be more difficult to get to know. They are the students who will most likely need the teacher's help in choosing a topic.

Donald Graves (1991) challenges himself to see how well he knows his students by making a chart. In the first column, he writes as many students as he can remember by name. In the second column, he writes something the student knows, an experience or interest the student has shared, and something that is unique to the student. In the third column, he checks off if the interest was confirmed for the child. He recommends that teachers challenge themselves to do this exercise after the first day of school, then again after three more days and continue until they can recall something about each student from memory. Some students are easy to get to know. The students that are the least talkative and open are the students who probably will need the most help in choosing topics. "They are often the children who find it

difficult to choose topics, to locate a territory of their own. They perceive themselves as nonknowers, persons without turf, with no place to stand" (Graves, 1983, p. 23).

Once the teacher has an idea about their different students' interests, they can help them choose something to write about. Certain students will have no trouble in selecting a topic, but others will complain that they do not know anything about anything. This is where the teacher can bring in their personal knowledge about the student and suggest a topic. "You went to visit your uncle last weekend, what could you write about that?" this teaches students to write about what they have experienced, or what they already have an interest in (Graves, 1983).

Another way to help students pick a topic is to encourage children to talk with each other. This can be done through share time, or by having students read their stories to one another. Students may keep folders and write down ideas as they come to mind. When one child is sharing a story, other children will be reminded of similar experiences. Many teachers have a 'Star of the Week' or a student who is honored each week in class and allowed to bring personal items to share about him or herself. After they share, the other students may ask them questions. Inevitably, the questions cause other students to share their similar experiences. This also happens with guest speakers. For an example, one teacher had a dentist visit the class. After he told how cavities were formed almost every hand went up. Calling on the first couple of students, he learned that they all had stories of their cavities, or lack thereof. Students need to be encouraged to write down ideas as they come to them, even if the idea comes from another person's story.

There is no need to be discouraged if students are not all writing on "hot" topics-- topics which bring an enthusiastic response. This is typical for beginning writers. "About one topic in four or five is a hot topic for children, or any professional writer" (Graves, 1983, p. 29). This means that everyone has "dry periods," when they are writing about topics that are not as interesting; however, it is not an excuse to stop writing. If one only wrote on topics they thought would be hot, they would miss out on all the ones that start as mediocre and become highly interesting. Conversely, it would be equally disappointing when stories that seemed interesting, failed to provide enough interest for a complete story. This is part of the writing experience. The key principle is that with practice students will improve in choosing topics and at writing.

Writing/Drafting

Many children think that adults have no difficulty writing, but merely pick up a pen and write. They also do not understand that adults write drafts, since children view drafting as a step only for struggling writers. "If they see us writing, they will see the middle of the process, the hidden ground – from the choice of topic to the final completion of the work" (Graves, 1983, p. 43). Teachers do not have to be expert writers to write with their students. Students can be encouraged when they see a teacher struggle through topic choice, starting a piece, looking for words to use and all the other frustrations that come with writing. This is part of the modeling process spoken of earlier. The teacher needs to learn to think out loud so the students hear what the teacher is struggling with. Teachers can also empower their students by asking them for help.

There are different ways to model writing. One way is for the teacher to get some paper and sit down when their students start writing, and start writing, too. Similarly, when students read silently, teachers may sit down with their book and read, too. This shows the students that the teacher values these activities enough to engage in them (Graves, 1983).

Before the teacher starts writing they might tell their students some of the ideas the teacher has to write about. The teacher could also share with their student how they decided on these topics. For example, a teacher might say, "Last night while reading about King Arthur, my cat hopped up on my lap. I thought I could write about the funny things my cat does. Or, I could write a story like the one I'm reading, a story about a knight from the Round Table." An example of teacher dialogue like this teaches the students to look for the stories happening around them. Next, the teacher should narrow the topic and tell the students how they made the selection. For example, "I think I will write about my cat. I have a lot to say about her. Maybe I'll write a story about a knight after I finish my book." If the teacher tells their students how they personally selected a topic before they started writing, it can help the students to realize there is a process of narrowing a topic (Graves, 1994).

When the teacher explains how a topic was chosen, they are not only modeling how to choose a topic, but they are letting the students know that they will be writing, too. The students are informed that the teacher is writing, so that is what they should be doing as well. The teacher may wish to tell the students that there can be no interruptions for five minutes as the class gets started on writing. "Children

interrupt for many reasons, but the chief reason is that they do not believe you are doing anything significant when you are not working with them" (Graves, 1983, p. 44). During this time when the teacher and the students are working quietly the students will learn to solve some of their problems on their own, and it is a good way to get the class working quietly. After about five minutes, the teacher may decide to call a group back to conference, or the teacher may walk around the room, individually conferencing with students. At the end of writing time, the teacher may decide to share what they wrote, or they may wait until another time.

Another way to write in front of students is on large sheets of paper hanging in front of the classroom. The teacher will need to write large enough that all students can read as the teacher writes. Similarly, acetate paper may be used on an overhead projector. Either of these methods is better than using a whiteboard or chalkboard because the teacher can save the work to revise later.

It is important to have the students' full attention, when using large paper or an overhead to write in front of students, unlike when a teacher writes on their own. Taking about 5-10 minutes, the teacher will compose in front of the children. "The objective of composing before children is to make explicit what children ordinarily can not see: how words go down on paper, and the thoughts that go with the decisions made in the writing" (Graves, 1983, p. 45).

The teacher should model selecting a topic in the same manner as described above and then demonstrate how to do a prewrite. Doing a prewrite in front of the students, shows them how writers use prewriting to organize ideas. The teacher may

be surprised at some of the details that are remembered during prewriting. Talking out loud, the teacher explains how they decide to start writing. As the teacher writes they may sound out words, or circle words they do not know how to spell (or pretend to not know how to spell). The teacher should write slowly. After writing a couple of sentences they can reread orally what they wrote, and then ponder out loud what they will write next. The teacher should let their students ask questions to lead the teacher in writing. When the teacher finishes a draft, they can tell the students what they plan to do next with their piece. For example, "I think I need to share this piece with someone so they can help me see what I am missing. After I add some more details I will need help with editing. I will then type my final draft" (Calkins, 1990).

The next time the class gets ready to write the teacher again can pull out their piece and read it with the class, having them listen to it and ask any questions. The teacher then models enhancing a draft, showing the students how to write notes in the margins. The teacher may place a number in the margin where they need to insert some missing information. Later the piece can be edited in front of the students so the children learn from the example. Every part of the writing process can be modeled. Different students will improve their various skills by seeing the process modeled.

Modeling can help teachers increase instructional effectiveness. When a person writes they begin to understand the process more clearly. They understand the struggles students have, and can start to see where they need to improve. Students trust teachers more who write in class because they see the teacher struggling with

writing, and being vulnerable. Students learn to look at writing as a puzzle that they can solve, rather than an impossible feat that only few can master.

Sharing and Responding

Children can do some revising on their own, but sharing their piece with other students is more effective. Children often think of their teacher as their only audience, so they write with the question, "What would be of interest to my teacher?" in mind. Also, it is no wonder so many children are concerned with spelling. When examining a teacher's red marks all over their papers, students can be led to think that spelling is most important. But through sharing, students learn that the class is their audience, and they start to think more about what will help their audience to better enjoy their piece. Children need to see the interest in the other students' faces as they read their story. They need to know which parts did not make sense, so that they can revise and improve the story. Sharing gives the writer a view of what the audience understands and students then become writers who want to communicate ideas to an audience.

Sharing and responding should not be tried without instruction on how to respond. Children will not know how to respond to writing unless we teach them. Donald Graves (1983) suggests teaching students to receive (listen to) a piece, then to question. First, a student will share their piece. Then, the children are to receive the piece or tell the author what was said using the author's exact words. This determines if the listeners understood what the author was trying to say. The author is also able to determine those ideas, which stood out to the audience. The author tells the other children "yes" if the piece was received correctly. If it was not clearly understood, the

text is used to show how it should have been received differently. If the text does not communicate what was intended, the writer now knows how to revise it. The listeners can help by asking questions about missing information. The teacher should model receiving and asking questions. Once the children understand, the teacher should allow the students to do it. A difficult concept to learn, it may take several weeks of modeling before individuals can receive and question on their own (Calkins, 1990; Graves, 1983).

There can be some problems with sharing and responding. Children can and will use their words as weapons. Donald Graves relayed what happened in one class, "Within minutes, someone would say, 'That's a stupid topic. That word is misspelled. Your lines are crooked'" (p. 37). To prevent inappropriate remarks a teacher must insure that there is a pattern or process for the students to use when sharing and responding, and that there are ground rules for critiquing another writer. Children must know that it is not appropriate to criticize a piece in this manner, and that they must be conscious of other people's feelings. The writer should read their piece out loud to a listener, rather than for the listener to read it himself. It is easier for children to stay focused on the story content, not the spelling errors, or the handwriting, when a story is read out loud. This also helps students to develop good listening skills.

The pattern they should learn is to receive the piece, ask the author if it was received correctly, and then ask questions. This is not the time for editing, or commenting on the person's penmanship. This is a time to help the author realize what their audience understands from the piece (Graves, 1983).

After the writer has shared their piece, they should make notes on what they need to revise while it is fresh in their mind. The important point is that the child realizes that the draft was rough, and that there is information that can be changed. It is helpful if the student verbalizes what they think they want to change. This makes them more likely to follow through. It is up to the writer to choose what they want to add or delete.

After a couple of months of sharing and responding, students start to question their own work. As they are writing, they will look at their work and anticipate what other children will ask. Then they will revise their piece, so that by the time they actually share it, their story has been expanded and details have been added. Not every child will have a chance to share everyday. Usually only three to four children will be able to share, so children need to be able to distance themselves from their piece, and see it how others would read it (Graves, 1994).

Revising

Children come to school knowing how to revise. When they play and build with their blocks, they constantly build and destroy, revising the object they have built. Children rearrange their toys and erase a drawing until it is just right. If a child is unable to adjust a project to be "perfect," they will usually abandon it. Writing is something they need help learning how to revise or they will abandon their writing (Graves, 1983).

"Professionals revise all the time because they are careful readers and evaluators of their own work and therefore know how to make it better. In contrast,

most students do not revise because they have not learned how to evaluate what they write; they have not internalized any consistent set of criteria or standards to which they can hold themselves" (White, 1994, p. 10). The challenge of teachers is to train their students to see what their work can become. This process gets easier the more children write. Children have to write to develop a sense of what is good writing, and how to best present their voice. When children start writing, there is relatively little voice shown. For example, "I like my cat." After a child develops more voice, they may write. "I like how my cat curls up on my lap as I try to do my homework." They have learned how to give the reader more information.

When a teacher tells a child to revise a paper, the child will interpret this differently, depending on where he or she is in their development as a writer. Early in the process a child will wonder how to revise and may think, "It looks fine to me." Without help from the teacher, a child will see little point in revision. As the child develops as a writer, their focus changes and they realize that their revisions must include more areas. Graves (1983, p. 152) gives these five stages:

1. Spelling
2. Motor-aesthetic (penmanship, general appearance)
3. Conventions (punctuation, capitalization)
4. Topic and Information
5. Major revisions (addition and exclusion of information, reorganization)

These stages show the dominant changes children go through. Children may make changes in all the areas, but the area that is dominant is the one that they do at a

conscious, independent level. Children notice early on that spelling is important to writing, so they focus on correcting their spelling when they revise. Soon they realize that the appearance matters too. When children rewrite, they do it to give the paper a neat appearance. As children progress, they learn to use conventions to help their story, then perhaps change a topic or add information, and finally, how to mold their piece of writing. The teacher's job is to bring the children's perception of what they are doing to the surface so that they can revise on their own. Children will be able to revise at a higher level while conferencing with the teacher. As the teacher questions and responds to the student, the student subconsciously learns how to question and respond to their writing, on their own. The goal is to practice this so that children become more and more independent (Calkins, 1990; Graves, 1994).

Not all changes will be made on the conscious level. Some changes are made because the child realizes that something does not sound right. It may not flow with the piece. Children develop this skill of perception as they write more. "Eye, hand, mouth, and ear work together, aiding a child to understand the process of putting words on paper" (Graves, 1983, p 152). Children's perceptions expand when they write. As they write they gain experience that will help them the next time they write.

Children also develop in the manner in which they revise. At first a student's idea of revision may be to add on to the end of the story. A first grader writing about their favorite animals may think of different animals to write about and add them into the story. This is an early form of revision. If you were to ask the child what they

were going to write about next, they may not know. An example of such writing would be:

Sadie was a fussy cat.

I like Sadie very much.

Matt likes Sadie.

Kim and I play with Sadie.

Jim likes Sadie.

When children first start writing they usually do not use a narrative form, and their stories may lack chronological order. There may not be a plot or order, but sentences that fall under a certain topic. It is hard to have children revise at this point because they are still struggling to get thoughts on paper. They probably are not developmentally ready for revision. They need to be praised for what they have accomplished (Graves, 1983).

For children, writing in logical order is easier in some genres than others. Writing a personal narrative is the least difficult because it recalls the events in chronological order and children know where missing information fits into the story. Fantasy and fiction are not as easy because children must invent and recall imagined information and come up with their own order of events. Figuring out the proper place for missing information is not as clear. One of the most difficult challenges for a child, is to figure out the order of information based on its relationship to the rest of the information. An example of this would be a nonfiction piece. If a child were to write about sharks, it would be more difficult for them to determine the order of their

sentences. Children often write streams of facts, without order. So the same child that may easily write a personal narrative may struggle and even give up on a non-fiction piece. As students gain experience in writing and as they read more non-fiction pieces, they will develop as writers (Freeman, 1992).

Children gain a greater understanding of time and order as they write. As they practice, they develop skills of narrative. Their stories start to tell events in the order they occurred. The previous story may be written later as:

I got a cat for my birthday.

I named the cat Sadie.

Matt, Kim and Jim came to see my cat.

They all like her.

At this point the teacher can ask the child questions like, "Why did you name your cat Sadie?" or "Tell me what you cat looks like?" These questions may or may not lead to revision. The teacher should not tell the child to include this information, because then the teacher is taking away the ownership of the piece. The teacher may ask, "Do you think that is important to your story?" If the child agrees, they may be ready to make additions. In the process of revision, adding information comes before deleting information. In the early stages of writing, children find everything they write to be important and dislike the idea of deleting any information (Graves, 1983).

When a child discovers that they have more to say, the teacher can help them by asking them where the new information fits into their story. When and where the child chooses to fit in the information, demonstrates to the teacher readiness for the

revision process. A child is used to adding any new information onto the end of the story, usually because this is the easiest place. If the child can show the teacher where the information naturally fits in, the teacher knows the child is ready to develop more complex revision skills. The teacher can then show the child how to use editing marks to insert information to where it best belongs. Once the child realizes that there is a way to add information, they are much more likely to try to add information on their next piece of writing.

A problem arises if the child is still focusing on the *motor-aesthetic issue* stage in their revision development. In this case the child sees the appearance of the paper as more important than the new information. As the child develops as a writer, content does overshadow aesthetics in value (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

As children begin to get in the habit of adding information, sometimes they will go overboard. They will write a piece that is too complete or redundant. Often the piece starts in the morning when the child wakes up and ends when the child goes to bed at night, the "bed to bed" story (Graves, 1983). The child does not know how or where to start the story. They see waking up as a logical start and going to sleep as a logical ending. The "bed to bed" story gives equal value to all parts of the day. There is as much, maybe more, written on getting up and going to bed as there is on the main action of the story. The main topic, or the reason for the piece of writing gets hidden in the other mundane actions. Children need to learn to value one part of their story over another part. They need to learn what is the central theme of their piece. Teachers can help children by asking them, "What did you want to write

about?" or "What is your favorite part?" "Until children can value one part of the story over another, and know how to heighten meaning through the exclusion and reorganization of information, they do not move to the next level of development in revision" (Graves, 1983, p. 156).

When children learn to value or emphasize one part over another, they are demonstrating additional advancement in their revising skills. It is not easy for any writer to delete, cross out, or erase something that they have written. For children, it is especially hard because many associate quantity with quality. Teachers can be good models by editing pieces out of their own writing, and asking if certain sections need to be included. The teacher needs to support the process of deleting extra information, by not penalizing students for the length of their piece (Carroll & Wilson, 1993; Harste, Short & Burke, 1988).

Another part of revision is the choosing of words, and word order. Children have to learn how to play with words. Words can make a strong impression when used correctly. For example: "My brother got mad" versus, "My brother stomped out of the room, slamming the door." Both sentences tell you that the brother was upset, but the second makes a much stronger impact. Sentence order can also be changed around to make a sentence more interesting. Many students start with "I" so learning how to switch the words in their sentences around can really help increase variety. "I dribbled the soccer ball down the field." Versus, "Dribbling the soccer ball, I ran down the field." This is something that will be hard for elementary students to learn

how to do, but with a teacher who models it, students will be more likely to attempt it on their own (Clark, 1987).

Revision is difficult because it, "not only involves more advanced reading skills and the adequate provision of information by the child, but the child's growing realization that the information can be manipulated, changed around, and lined out" (Graves, 1983, p. 157). Revision is the one part of the writing process that takes the most work and practice. It is the part that children want to skip, but after they see what they can accomplish, revision helps them to gain the most pride in their writing. Revision takes a sketch and turns it into a masterpiece.

Editing

At this stage the students have written down all their content ideas. Now is the time to focus on mechanics, as they are polishing their piece. A piece is edited by checking for items such as capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, word usage and all other conventions commonly used in standard written English. Many students do not understand the purpose of editing. Conventions are considered courtesy for those who will read your piece. Students need to realize that poor conventions ruin the delivery of the information. Writing is in vain if it is not readable (Carroll & Wilson, 1993).

If a teacher does the editing for the students, the students will never learn how to edit their own pieces. Editing is an important skill that must be taught. Standard written English has many conventions that follow rules. Teachers can teach the rules through rote practice, but studies have shown that this is not the best way to teach

students grammar skills. The best way to teach students these skills is during the editing of a piece of their own writing. This is when the students have the greatest interest in learning convention skills, since they want to communicate their writing effectly. When students learn mechanical skills within the writing process they are much more likely to remember to use them next time. They are also better able to explain why the convention is needed (Bissex, 1980; Calkins, 1980; Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wylie, 1976; Graves, 1983).

When students first finish their piece, is not the best time to edit their piece. They need to distance themselves from the piece for a few days because the students become so familiar with their piece that they would not be able to see the errors. They know what it should say, so they read that instead of what it really says. They may also be burned out on a piece. After a few days students can return to their piece with a fresh view, ready to complete their paper. During the time when they are not working on their piece they can begin gathering ideas for a new piece, or they may need a break from writing. If this is the case, they should be allowed to read (Graves, 1983).

When students edit they need to learn how to read slowly, word by word, searching for errors rather than reading for content. This is called proofreading (King, 1985). This is difficult for students who have been taught to read books for content, and comprehension of what they have read. The teacher must model how proofreading is done. A teacher can do this by photocopying a child's piece of writing, with their permission, to be edited by the whole class; or a teacher can use

their own writing as an example. The teacher models how during proofreading you will read the piece several times hunting for different errors. A pencil may be used to touch each word as spelling errors are searched for. Editing marks can be used to correct the errors. The children will enjoy using editing marks that professional, adult writers and their editors use (Carroll & Wilson, 1993).

Students will not catch every error. An 'editing checklist' can help them remember what to look for. First grade writers may check for capitals at the beginning of each sentence and periods at the end. For older children a teacher may add and adjust what they check for. No more than six items should be on the checklist, or it becomes overwhelming for the students. After the students have edited their paper to the best of their ability it is beneficial for another student to do a second edit. Professional authors have editors to edit their work. Students should also have a second editor. The editor also benefits from the extra practice at proofreading (Calkins, 1986).

After the student have proofread their work, making as many corrections as they can, they will learn that some corrections will come easily, while others will be more difficult. Students will need to be taught how to use dictionaries and a language handbook. Teachers need to decide if they want to further edit the students' pieces or let them be published as they are. There may be times when a piece needs to be perfect, such as if it is being published in a newspaper. If the piece is being published for the class to read, it is acceptable if not everything is corrected, as long as the students did their best to correct it (Graves, 1991).

After the student has corrected everything to the best of their knowledge it is time to make some decisions about what they are going to do with their finalized piece. They may desire to show it to the teacher, in which case it will probably be just neatly written on lined paper. If they are going to make it into a book they need to choose the correct paper and paper size to write on. They may type their final draft rather than handwrite it. If they want to illustrate their story, they may want to start half way down the page. Once these decisions are made it is time to write the final draft. The child should be encouraged to use their neatest writing.

Publishing

Publishing is an important goal for writers. Where and how the piece is published determines who their audience is going to be. It also may affect the length of the piece. Publishing puts demands on the writer. Writing is for reading and thus the writer must keep the reader in mind (Clark, 1987).

Not every piece will be published. Students should pick about one piece out of every three to four to publish. There are many ways for a piece to be published. One way is to make it into a book. Children enjoy seeing their work in a book because it looks professional.

There are many ways for students to create books. A simple way is to fold sheets of paper in half and staple them together. Another way is to stick pages in a piece of construction paper or other sturdy paper. Students may decide to cut the paper for their book into a shape. A story about dogs may be in a dog shaped book. Students really enjoy making hardback books. This can be done using cardboard cut

to any size. Students may choose to cover their book with wallpaper, contact paper, or even cloth. The pages can be glued, sewn or stapled into place. The first and last page can be glued to the cover to make the book sturdier. Students might want to include an "About the Author" on the last page. When a child sees their work in book form, they cannot help but be proud. They have become like professional writers (Graves, 1991).

Another way to publish a piece is to have the student type the piece. The student can decide on a font to suit the story. Special paper may also be used. If the school has a newsletter, students' work can be submitted. Many newspapers will publish students' writing on their children's page. Any form on publishing gives students the extra incentive to produce their best work.

What about Spelling, Handwriting, and Grammar?

"Conventional spelling, neat handwriting, and standard English grammar have been considered the hallmarks of an educated person" (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995, p. 459). Recently these important components have changed from being the goal of education, to the tools used by readers and writers. They help writers to communicate to their audience. As the teacher teaches students to be readers and writers, spelling, handwriting, and grammar are learned too.

The writing process is beneficial in teaching students how to spell. It has been shown to work better than weekly spelling tests, because the student gains a purpose for spelling words correctly. "Spelling is for writing. Children may achieve high scores on phonic inventories, or weekly spelling tests. But the ultimate test is what the

child does under "game conditions," within the process of moving toward meaning" (Graves, 1983, p. 193-194). Often students will misspell words in their journal writing or story writing that they spelled correctly on Friday's spelling test. This failure to transfer spelling test knowledge, to daily writing can be frustrating. When students learn that they need to spell correctly to communicate effectively, or to effectively share their writing with others, spelling becomes more important. How often will students be given a spelling test in real life? Since the real test is in their everyday writing, this is how they should be taught.

Children are not born being able to spell. Researchers have identified five different stages that children go through when learning to spell. These stages are pre-communicative spelling, semi-phonetic spelling, phonetic spelling, transitional spelling, and conventional spelling (Gentry, 1982). During the first four stages, students will use invented spelling as they try to write. Invented spelling is part of the trial and error that students go through as they discover how to spell (Chomsky, 1997). Pre-communicative spellers make letters, but do not associate the letters to sounds. They know letters are used to communicate meaning but are not sure how to use letters. Children at this stage are usually age three years to five years. The second stage, called the semi-phonetic stage is usually made up of five to six year olds. Children at this stage start to understand the sound relationship of letters. They may use one, two, or three letters to represent a word. Often they do not use vowels. At around seven to nine years of age, most children start the transitional stage of spelling. At this stage children are better able to represent the features of Standard

English orthography (spelling). They use vowels, and spell most words correctly. They still struggle with irregularly spelled words. At the last stage, conventional spelling, students are spelling 90% or more of the words correctly. Usually this stage is reached by the time a child is eight or nine years old. The children are still working on using the correct homonyms and spelling irregularly spelled words (Carroll & Wilson, 1993; Gentry, 1993; Stewig & Norberg, 1995; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

Knowing the stages helps teachers know what to expect of their students. First grade students should be expected to use invented spelling. In a case where writing is going public, the teacher can help the child make corrections. Even in published work, overly stressed correct spelling may hinder the younger students' creativity. The content of the writing is what is most important (Chomsky, 1997; Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

As the students get older, better spelling will be expected. Gentry (1982) feels that students should not be required to take list tests until they are at the transitional spelling stage. "Learning happens through reading and writing experiences rather than through weekly spelling tests; when too much attention is placed on conventional or correct spelling before children have reached the fifth stage, their natural development is interrupted" (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995, p. 464). This does not mean that spelling instruction should be ignored. There are many word patterns, along with commonly used words, that can and should be taught to students. Spelling tests will give some students an incentive to learn the words, but students should not

be tested on words that are too advanced for their level of development. Learning spelling through writing should be expected.

Elementary students' everyday writing should not be graded on spelling. Students should be encouraged to write as best as they can, leaving spelling corrections until the editing stage in the writing process. The more practice students have at writing the faster they will progress in developing spelling. Spelling then becomes a tool to help their writing. Students will invent spelling as they need words, but direct spelling instruction will gradually lead to more conventional spelling. Students learn through editing how to proofread to find spelling errors and that spelling is important when someone else is going to read your work. When students discover their own spelling errors, they are less likely to make them in future writing (Chomsky, 1997; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

As spelling is a tool used by writers, so is handwriting. Writing is the substance of the composition, while handwriting is the formation of letters on paper. Children need to develop a legible and fluent style of handwriting so that it does not hinder their composition. Handwriting that is legible can be quickly and easily read. If the writer's handwriting in not legible, the reader is unable to comprehend the writer's thoughts. Fluency in handwriting is the skill children master to quickly and fluently write. Legibility and fluency are equally important to writing. "Handwriting is the vehicle carrying information on its way to a destination" (Graves, 1983, p. 171). If the writing is illegible the message will never reach its destination. On the other hand, if the student is not a fluent writer, the process of writing down thoughts

becomes tedious and time consuming. Children who struggle in this area need to keep referring back to review what they wrote; after one or two sentences the child becomes tired and looses interest.

Handwriting is a skill that receives a lot of attention, and is valued by society. If a job application is turned in with poor handwriting, a negative first impression has already been made. Most students do not see the importance of good handwriting. Students will learn the value of handwriting by writing and reading others' writing. A teacher can show examples of different pieces, with varying levels of handwriting. Students will see first hand that they are drawn to the examples with neater handwriting. When students share their work with others, they realize the importance of legibility. This becomes even more important as they read papers others have written. They will notice how easy it is to read a paper if it is neatly written (Norton, 1993).

It is unrealistic to expect that children's handwriting will be at their best every time they pick up a pencil or a pen. There are times when the quality of handwriting is the focus, and other times when neatness is sacrificed for the flow of creativity. Children need to learn the difference. When children are writing their first draft, it needs to be legible enough to reread, but it does not have to be the children's best effort. If children give their best effort every time they write, they lose speed and interrupt the flow of ideas. When the final draft is written, legible handwriting becomes crucial, since the teacher and other students will be reading the piece. Teachers can help students realize when to focus on speed and when neatness is more

important, by explaining the difference between the rough and final drafts. A piece should not be graded on handwriting unless the child is aware they are being graded. Teachers may want to let students choose a piece that they want to be graded on for handwriting, so the student can write as legibly as possible (Stewig & Norberg, 1995; Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995).

Handwriting is important to writing because it controls how easily the writer writes, and how easy the piece is for others to read. "Researchers have found that teachers consistently give higher grades to papers with better handwriting than to papers with poor handwriting, regardless of the content" (Tompkins, 1995, p. 492). This is not ideal, but children need to realize this reality. Their writing will be judged on handwriting, because legibility is the first impression a composition makes.

Grammar is one of the most controversial areas of language arts. There is much disagreement on the content of grammar instruction, how to teach it, and how young to begin teaching it. Some people believe that grammar does not need to be formally taught, but that children will develop it naturally. Others believe the opposite, that grammar is the most important thing taught in language arts (Goba & Brown, 1982). "Grammar is the description of the structure of a language" (Tompkins & Hoskisson, 1995, p. 493). It has to do with word and sentence formation. Using a correct word in a sentence is called usage. "Grammar is the rationale of language; usage is its etiquette" (Fraser & Hodson, 1978 p. 52). Children tend to make more usage errors than grammar errors.

Tompkins (1995) says that children learn grammar unconsciously as they learn to talk. By the time children are in kindergarten they have an almost complete grasp of grammar. Grammar instruction takes what is intuitive about the English language and makes it explicit by providing labels for words within sentences, parts of sentences, and types of sentences. Studies show that students naturally improve in grammar as they get older. (Applebee & his colleagues, 1987). Studies have failed prove that grammar instruction dramatically decreases the number of errors that students make while writing. If grammar instruction takes away from actual composition time, it actually can have a negative affect on writing (Hillocks, 1987). One of the best ways to teach grammar is to combine it with reading and writing (Noyce & Christie, 1983). As with spelling and handwriting, grammar should be thought of as a tool to help writing. It fits into the revising and editing stages of the writing process. It can be taught through mini-lessons. The teacher can take an area in grammar in which students seem to be struggling and use their writing as samples to teach the lesson. When teachers use mini-lessons to teach grammar the students are able to make an immediate connection to apply these skills in their writing (Atwell, 1987).

In the writing process spelling, handwriting, and grammar are all tools that help children to communicate more effectively. Handwriting has two goals, to be legible and fluent. Grammar helps students to structure their sentences correctly. Spelling, handwriting and grammar all improve with daily reading and writing. They

can also be taught through mini-lessons correlating with the children's needs in writing.

Evaluating

Giving a grade is not the best way to evaluate a piece of writing. Sometimes grading is used to test the students on their writing, but otherwise students should be evaluated on the progress they have made. If they start the year as a struggling writer they cannot be evaluated on the same scale as a student who already has mastered the art of writing. Student work has to be saved so that it can be evaluated in relation to other pieces produced by the same student (Carroll & Wilson, 1993; Heller, 1991).

Writing folders help keep track of students' progress. One way to organize the folder is to have the child list pieces they have written on the front cover of the folder. This helps the teacher to keep track of how many pieces the child is producing. Placing a star on the list next to the published books lets the teacher know how many books were published. On the inside the student can list ideas for future stories and cross them out as they are used. This list should grow day by day as the student gets ideas from books, events, other students' stories and everyday life. Inside the folder should be samples of the student's work. The inside back cover can be a personal editing checklist. It can include specific areas the child is working on, or it might even include trouble words that the child commonly uses in writing. The entire folder can be a resource for both the teacher and the student (Graves, 1991).

The contents of the folder are most important. Samples of past writing and works in progress should be in the folder. Teachers can have students keep certain

pieces as samples of their work, or teachers may want to photocopy pieces to keep as samples. Often students want to take their work home to show off to their mother and father. Each month a sample should be kept, but others can be sent home. Sometimes the student will select the piece, other times the teacher will pick the piece to be saved (Calkins, 1990).

Keeping work is important because not only can the teacher go back and see the child's growth, but the child can see their own progress as well. It is important for children to track their growth. Unless work is saved at school, the majority of students will never reread past pieces. Children need to learn how to evaluate their own work. "Self-assessment is a crucial skill that we must teach our students, whatever they may be attempting to learn" (White, 1994, p. 10). Through the process of teacher asked questions, the child is lead toward self-assessment. Children will usually be honest and will tell the teacher if they put their best effort into a piece of writing.

Conferencing

Conferencing can happen at any step of the writing process. Conferencing is when the teacher listens to the individual student's writing, one on one. It is important that the teacher really listens, rather than trying to formulate thought provoking questions while the student reads their piece. A teacher may see how they would rework the child's paper and want to give constructive criticism. "We look at a student's rough draft and have an urge to take it over, to make it match our expectation" (Calkins, 1986, p. 119). The teacher needs to listen first as a person, not just a teacher. When a teacher listens as a person, they will be affected by the piece.

Teachers need to enjoy what the child created with a laugh, a cry, a sigh in agreement, or even a smile. The child needs to know that they were heard. A simple emotional response may be enough to show the child that they have been heard. When moment is right the teacher can bring in tips, ask questions to help the child advance as a writer, and give constructive criticism.

Teachers should not ask leading questions which coerce or manipulate students into writing the teachers ideas into their piece. Instead the teacher should be trying to get the students to interact with their work in progress. "I nudge students into re-vision, into looking through what they have said to see what they can discover" (Calkins, 1986, p. 119). The student does the talking while the teacher does the listening.

The purpose of a conference is to keep the teacher and the child in touch with the child's writing. It should not to be a long process. Most conferencing can take place as the teacher circles the room. Teachers wonder how they can reach all their students, but a conference can be done in one to two minutes. If each conference did take a full two minutes, 15 students would be reached in 30 minutes. In most cases conferences would not take that long, so a teacher could easily reach all the students in the class. Donald Graves (1994) finds three important aspects to conferences. "(1) Where did the piece come from? (2) Where is the piece now? (3) Where will the piece be going?" (p. 62). So when the teacher meets with the child they are probing for the basic history of the piece. Often this would not take long. It may only take sixty seconds for the student to give the history of their piece, where they are

struggling, and what they might try in order to get through that struggle. Sometimes all the teacher has to do is ask the questions: "How is it going? What do you think you should do?" and then tell the child to go for it. The teacher is allowing the student to think out loud and is confirming that the child has a workable solution.

Donald Graves (1991) estimates that in 80 percent of conferences, the children can explain what they are doing. If a child seems unsure, the teacher can ask questions so that the child can regain control of their story. He suggests that in only about ten percent of conferences the teacher will have to spend some time teaching. When a teacher finds a teachable moment, they need to teach to the "zone of proximal development," that is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In other words, a teacher will spend only about two minutes demonstrating what the child needs in order to gain the next step. Giving a child all the steps takes away from their voice and ownership.

Sometimes during a conference a teacher may have to question a student's procedure. For the writing process to go smoothly certain steps must be followed. If a student informs the teacher that they are writing their final draft, but have never shared the piece with that teacher, steps may have been left out. Rather than telling the student how to revise their paper, the teacher can ask leading questions to find out how that student decided they were ready for their final draft. The teacher can help the student to assess which steps they forgot. Students can go over individual stories

and the steps as a small group. This procedure helps the child to remember all the steps, and they have the opportunity to consult with an instructor if they have questions (Graves, 1991).

In a successful conference the child and the teacher hear the child's voice. The teacher should never take the lead. The child should decide what would be the next step for their piece, possibly prompted by the teacher asking, "What do you plan to do next?" If there is a chance for the teacher to guide the student through problem solving this should be done, while never losing the child's voice. The student should feel that they have some work to do, whether it is continuing their piece or pondering a solution. Although the conference may be quick, it is effective because the teacher focuses on a single issue and lets the student do the talking. The teacher listens and confirms where the child is going. There should not be a rushed feeling, but both the student and the teacher should feel that everything was covered in the brief conference (Graves, 1991).

A conference is not a time for mini-lessons. A conference is not the time to teach grammar, spelling or convention skills. This would be too time consuming and the teacher would have to teach the same concept repeatedly. These skills are more effectively taught as whole class lessons or in small groups.

As a teacher circulates the room, students will be chosen to stop and conference with based on their need. Most likely the teacher will not start with one desk and move person to person around the room. Instead, with a quick glance at the room, and with knowledge of the students, the teacher should have an idea which

students need priority. There may be some students that the teacher will conference with more than once in a writing period and others that may only need a conference every few days. The students who may have difficulty getting started until they are verbally told what to do or those who are starting a new piece should be visited first. Next, conference with students to determine how their story is working out (Graves, 1991).

Creating a Writing Environment

The teacher sets the atmosphere in the classroom. For the writing process to work the teacher must have a positive attitude about teaching writing and must expect success. It is also important that the teacher is also writing (Calkins, 1990; Graves, 1991). The teacher needs to model a good example of the writing process. Many teachers do not realize the importance of writing and sharing their writing with their students. Potential pianists do not take lessons from someone who does not know how to play; they expect their teacher to show or model how to play correctly.

> We do not see many teachers of oil painting, piano, ceramics, or drama who are not practitioners in their fields. The students see them in action in the studio. They cannot teach without showing what they mean. There is a process to follow. There is a process to learn. That's the way it is with a craft, whether it be teaching or writing. There is a road, a journey to travel, and there is someone to travel with us, someone who has already made the trip (Graves, 1983, p. 6).

Besides being able to model writing, teachers need to be able to explain what they are doing, and what to look for. A model without an explanation is useless, as is an explanation without a model.

The classroom needs to become a studio for writing, a place where the students are all working at their own pace. As in an art studio, the students may be working on different types of pieces and be at different stages in the process. The one thing they should have in common is that they are all working. With children, this is a hard goal to accomplish. The students must be taught how to work independently, training them for the procedures they are to follow.

"The writing process approach requires a radically different pace and classroom structure than we are used to in our schools" (Calkins, 1986, p. 23). To use the writing process, students need time. They need time to go through all the stages and to focus on the issues they are going to write about. Calkins (1990) suggests that students get an hour block of time each day for writing. The writing process will work on less time, but it should be afforded a minimum of three days a week. If a student starts a story on Monday and does not get to work on it again until Friday, he may have lost the excitement and creative flow of writing the story. If on Monday the student reads their story to the class and gets feedback, but cannot revise it until Friday, they have forgotten what needed to be changed. If it is practiced only one or two days a week it is hard to get into a rhythm of writing. By giving children a chance to write every day, they will find their rhythm and writing will become easier and more enjoyable (Calkins, 1986; Carroll & Wilson, 1993; Graves, 1991).

Writing time also needs to be routine. Have it scheduled so the students know when to expect it. It does not have to be at the same time everyday, but set a schedule so the students can be ready to write. If the students know the class writes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, they are going to be thinking about their topic the night before. If they know writing time is after recess, when they come in from recess they will be prepared to write. They anticipate writing. "Children, like the rest of us, will 'write' when they are not writing if writing becomes a regular and frequent part of their lives" (Calkins, 1986, p. 25).

Another important reason for having a predictable time for writing is so that students can take control of their writing process. The ultimate goal is for students to independently work through the writing process. They need to be able to plan how they are going to work through a piece. They may think, "I'll write a draft today and on Wednesday I can share it with someone to see if I'm getting my point across." If the teacher is always changing the class schedule, students feel insecure or loose interest in writing, since they cannot predict when they will be able to work on their story. Students lose the initiative (drive) to plan ahead.

A routine needs to be established during the writing block of time. This routine may take several months to instill. It may not be until December that the teacher can stand back and watch their students work. The structure should be so simple that the students can follow through on their own. "*How* we structure the workshop is less important than *that* we structure it..." (Calkins, 1986, p. 26). The structure should involve a self writing time and a conferencing time. The ideal form

of conferencing would be the teacher working with a small group of children, while the rest of the class worked independently. The teacher would meet with all the students at least once a week. However, until the students can work independently, it would cause chaos for the teacher to leave the majority of the class working on their own. Therefore, the students need to be trained on each step during this period of writing.

While students are being trained, conferences should not be neglected. Conferences can still be done whole class or individually as the teacher circulates around the room. The students should be moving through the writing process during this time. Before the students can do this independently, the teacher has to teach them each stage in the writing process. If they have not learned how to prewrite, they may be unable to begin. The teacher needs to train the students how to move through the process on their own, and to do it so that when a student finishes with a draft, they do not sit idly, or worse disturb others who are trying to write. They need to know what to do when they finish each stage in the writing process and how to move ahead to the next stage. Early in the year this may all be done whole class, but hopefully as the year continues students will take a more active role (Graves, 1986).

The teacher should try to anticipate what kinds of problems might arise and how to solve them. Some of the problems, children may need help with include spelling, supplies, topic choice, punctuation, what to write about next, and what to do with a finished piece. Some students may be disruptive because they have trouble focusing on their writing. The teacher needs to find a way to solve all these problems.

The best way is to address the problems with the students in advance and explaining the procedure to acquire assistance in each circumstance. The teacher may want to discus these problems in a class meeting, and come up with a procedure as a class. Children may circle words they do not know how to spell. Later they can look them up in a dictionary, ask a friend or the teacher. If the students are having trouble with topic choice the teacher might have them check their folder for ideas. Teachers may have a conference area where they can meet with students to discuss ideas. Each class is unique and will have their own problems that must be faced. If the teacher is willing to deal with issues that come up, there should not be anything that cannot be solved (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988).

Some problems can be predicted and dealt with ahead of time. Writing involves paper and pencils. A spot should be set in the room where the children know they can find these supplies. Different kinds of paper should be there for prewrites and to add variety. Colored pens for editing are also helpful, along with tape and staples for rearranging their papers. To avoid students losing work that they are working on you can have writing folders. At writing time the folders will get passed out, then afterwards they will be collected. This way papers are not crushed in their desk; or accidentally taken home or thrown away. A procedure needs to be developed for sharing and responding. This can be done whole class at a specific time, or through sign-up sheets for small groups. A teacher might want to instead assign everyone in the class a partner to share and respond with at the appropriate stages in their writing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1991).

Solving the problem of disruptive students will vary from case to case, and will depend on the reasons why. If they are disruptive because they have trouble beginning, the teacher can meet with them before each writing period to make sure that they know what they are going to be working on that day. Eventually, students will become self-motivated. If they have trouble focusing with the distractions of other student, those students may require a special area in the classroom where they go to write. The students may use raised folders, at their desks, during writing time to block out distractions. The goal is to train students to work independently (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988).

The Purpose of Mini-Lessons

Students do not come to school knowing the writing process or all the Standard English conventions. Mini-lessons are used to teach how to move through the writing process, and how to develop as a writer. Mini-lessons can include the whole class, small groups, or one on one. The idea of mini-lessons is to teach concepts in short lessons based on their individual stage in the writing process. Mini-lessons can be used to teach each stage in the writing process along with the skills needed to improve writing. For example, if students are not using quotation marks to indicate dialogue, a mini-lesson on the usefulness of quotation marks and the practical application quotation marks, teaches students the importance of using quotation marks. Worksheets and grammar book questions can be boring and pointless to students, but when students learn how to apply new strategies to their own work, they find purpose in the skills (Carroll& Wilson, 1993; Graves, 1991).

The Typical Day

As a teacher, it is known that there is no such thing as a "typical day". There are assemblies, fire drills, library, guest speakers, specialists and much more that interrupt the day and keep it from a perfect routine. Knowing this, writing should be scheduled at a time with as few interruptions as possible. Even without needless distractions, getting into the flow of writing can be difficult. "Unless there is time for writing a minimum of four times each week for at least thirty-five or forty minutes, you will feel pressured" (Graves, 1991, p. 93). Each day should allow the students at least 20 minutes of writing time. The students will be at different stages in the writing process. Some may be starting a story while others are working on their final draft. But all students should have a work in progress. One way for the teacher to keep track of where their students are in the writing process is to have a chart where the students move a clothespin with their name on it to the different stages. This way they can keep track if a student is getting stuck in a certain area. The teacher can also visually track how many students need to share their writing before they can revise (Graves, 1991).

Teachers should vary how they begin each writing period. Mini-lessons are a good way to begin teaching the writing process, working on a convention of writing, working on the writer's voice, a certain genre of writing, or something the students are struggling with. There are many books filled with mini-lessons on teaching writing.

Another way to begin is by reading a short story. After the story is read the teacher can ask students what the story reminded them of or what it makes them think of. The teacher can also talk about the way the author wrote the story and point out that the students may want to try this style. Reading a story may also lead into a mini-lesson. If the author used many adjectives, this can be pointed out as a positive addition to the story. Then the students can be encouraged to add adjectives to their own writing. A story can also be read without a following discussion. Many kids will enjoy the story and then will return to whatever they were working on before, but a student who was having trouble coming up with something to write about may be able to get ideas from the story that will facilitate their own writing (Calkins, 1990).

During the 20 or more minutes when the children are writing the teacher may be walking around having one to two minute conferences to check on how the students are doing and to assist those who need instruction. Conversely, the teacher may call a group to the back for a mini-lesson or a sharing time. On some days the teacher may be writing their own piece or working on a combined piece with a student. Other days the teacher will meet with individual students to evaluate their work. What is important is that all the children are working on writing (Graves, 1991).

Each day should also include some sharing time. Only about four students should share per day so that the class really focuses on listening to the student sharing. Sharing reminds the students, that they are writing for an audience. It also allows them to observe their peers reactions to their writing. In addition, audience

questions can help the student clarify their story during revision or provide additional ideas for their writing. (Graves, 1991).

Conclusion

Primary aged students come to school usually knowing how to speak and listen, but must learn to read and write. Teaching children to write can be difficult because spelling and grammar get in the way, along with a feeling that only certain people are writers. Children must learn the value of writing before they will be motivated to do it themselves.

Teachers usually have manuals with procedures for teaching reading and math clearly explained. Writing instruction is usually left to the teacher to develop. Teaching spelling, grammar, and sentence structure will not produce quality writers. The writing process can be taught to provide students a structure for writing. It includes these six stages: pre-writing, writing, sharing and responding, revising, editing, and publishing. Each stage should be modeled and explained to the students. Once the students understand the stages they should be able to work fairly independently through the entire process. The teacher will continue to do mini-lessons on spelling, grammar, and conventions as the students develop as writers. The lessons will clarify areas of difficulty for the students.

Another important component to the writing process is conferencing. Conferencing is the part of the process when the teacher listens to an individual or a small group of writers, then asks questions to help the writer continue writing.

Conferences should be brief. The teacher should be careful not to take the ownership away from the writer.

The writing process is the process that professional writers utilize. It is not a linear process but rather a circular process that enables writers to move back and forth, from stage to stage at different times. Students who learn the process, produce better work because they learn the steps to take a piece from a rough draft to a final draft, communicating their message to an audience in a more effective manner.

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